Health Benefits of Bananas

Creamy, rich, and sweet, bananas are a favorite food for everyone from infants to elders. Sports enthusiasts appreciate the potassium-power delivered by this high energy fruit.

Cardiovascular Protection from Potassium and Fiber

Bananas are one of our best sources of potassium, an essential mineral for maintaining normal blood pressure and heart function. Since the average banana contains a whopping 467 mg of potassium and only 1 mg of sodium, a banana a day may help to prevent high blood pressure and protect against atherosclerosis.

The effectiveness of potassium-rich foods such as bananas in lowering blood pressure has been demonstrated by a number of studies. For example, researchers tracked over 40,000 American male health professionals over four years to determine the effects of diet on blood pressure. Men who ate diets higher in potassium-rich foods, as well as foods high in magnesium and cereal fiber, had a substantially reduced risk of stroke.

A study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine also confirms that eating high fiber foods, such as bananas, helps prevent heart disease. Almost 10,000 American adults participated in this study and were followed for 19 years. People eating the most fiber, 21 grams per day, had 12% less coronary heart disease (CHD) and 11% less cardiovascular disease (CVD) compared to those eating the least, 5 grams daily. Those eating the most water-soluble dietary fiber fared even better with a 15% reduction in risk of CHD and a 10% risk reduction in CVD.

Interestingly enough it has been said that because Bananas contain B vitamins, which are essential for converting carbohydrates to energy they are believed to help manufacture sex hormones such as testosterone. Grab a banana a few hours before getting busy.
Soothing Protection from Ulcers

Bananas have long been recognized for their antacid effects that protect against stomach ulcers and ulcer damage. In one study, a simple mixture of banana and milk significantly suppressed acid secretion. In an animal study, researchers found that fresh bananas protected the animals' stomachs from wounds.

Bananas work their protective magic in two ways: First, substances in bananas help activate the cells that compose the stomach lining, so they produce a thicker protective mucus barrier against stomach acids. Second, other compounds in bananas called protease inhibitors help eliminate bacteria in the stomach that have been pinpointed as a primary cause of stomach ulcers.

Improving Elimination

Bananas are a smart move if you suffer from elimination problems. A bout of diarrhea can quickly deplete your body of important electrolytes. Bananas can replenish your stores of potassium, one of the most important electrolytes, which helps regulate heart function as well as fluid balance.

Protect Your Eyesight

Your mother may have told you carrots would keep your eyes bright as a child, but as an adult, it looks like fruit is even more important for keeping your sight. Data reported in a study published in the Archives of Ophthalmology indicates that eating 3 or more servings of fruit per day may lower your risk of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD), the primary cause of vision loss in older adults, by 36%, compared to persons who consume less than 1.5 servings of fruit daily.

Three servings of fruit may sound like a lot to eat each day, but by simply tossing a banana into your morning smoothie or slicing it over your cereal, topping off a cup of yogurt or green salad with a half cup of berries, and snacking on an apple, plum, nectarine or pear, you've reached this goal.
Build Better Bones with Bananas

Build better bones by eating bananas? Yes, enjoying bananas frequently as part of your healthy way of eating can help improve your body's ability to absorb calcium via several mechanisms.

Bananas are an exceptionally rich source of fructooligosaccharide, a compound called a prebiotic because it nourishes probiotic (friendly) bacteria in the colon. These beneficial bacteria produce vitamins and digestive enzymes that improve our ability to absorb nutrients, plus compounds that protect us against unfriendly microorganisms. When fructooligosaccharides are fermented by these friendly bacteria, not only do numbers of probiotic bacteria increase, but so does the body's ability to absorb calcium. In addition, gastrointestinal transit time is lessened, decreasing the risk of colon cancer.

Research published in Digestive Diseases and Sciences underscores just how much bananas can improve nutrient absorption. In this study, 57 male babies (5-12 months) with persistent diarrhea of at least 14 days duration were given a week's treatment with a rice-based diet containing either green banana, apple pectin or the rice diet alone. Treatment with both green banana and apple pectin resulted in a 50% reduction in stool weights, indicating that the babies were absorbing significantly more nutrients.